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Baltic leaders cool towards Russian invitation

COPENHAGEN, March 12 (Reuter) - Baltic leaders agreed on Sunday to wait and watch Russia's behaviour over coming weeks before deciding if they should attend May celebrations in Moscow marking the 50th anniversary of the end of World War Two. Latvian President Guntis Ulmanis said he and his counterparts from Estonia and Lithuania, Lennart Meri and Algirdas Brazauskas, met on the sidelines of a U.N. social summit to discuss relations with Russia and other issues. "Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia suffered greatly during Soviet occupation. The feeling at home is that these three countries should not go to Moscow," Ulmanis told Reuters. "We have made no decision yet. We have to consider the situation in Russia -- how democratic the situation is on May 8 and 9," Ulmanis added, speaking through an interpreter. The three Baltic states were annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940 and deep suspicion and bitterness towards Russia still remain, three years after their independence. Ulmanis said that any decision to accept the invitation to Moscow would have to be accompanied by measures to ease Baltic apprehensions, heightened of late by Russia's use of massive force against separatist rebels in its Chechnya region. "We would have to explain to our people what guarantees we had that events of the last 50 years will not be repeated," Ulmanis said. U.S. Vice President Al Gore is due to visit Estonia on Monday for talks with Baltic leaders on regional security issues, including the situation in Chechnya, U.S. administration officials said earlier in Washington.

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